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The Cessation of Miracles, Tongues and Prophecies

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1. [1 Cor. 13:8-12](#). This is the key passage concerning the cessation of prophecies and speaking in tongues.

A. First we will look at this passage and see what it says about the time when prophecies and speaking in

tongues will cease. The key questions are what does Paul mean by "that which is perfect" and be the

phrase "face to face." Are these references to Jesus and the Second Coming, as charismatic

maintain? Or do they refer to the completion of the NT canon?

B. Paul writes: Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are

tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. This is where much of the

battle with charismatic teachers takes place.

The question then is not, "Will prophecies pass away?"

The question is not, "Will speaking in tongues cease?"

The only question here is this: **When** will prophecies pass away?

When will speaking in tongues cease?

C. [Prophecies and tongues will cease when "that which is perfect is come."](#) (1 Cor. 13:8, 9)

A 1) The word Paul uses for "perfect" (**teleios**) is never used to refer to the Second Coming.

A different word is used for the Second Coming, **telos**. **τελειος** means: having attained the end or

purpose, complete, perfect (Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon). This is the way it is used in the New

Testament.

τελειος

1 Cor. 2:6; ; 13:10; 14:20

In everyone of these examples we can see that the word means mature or complete.

1 Cor. 13:10 When perfection comes, then that which is in part disappears.

1 Cor. 2:6 We speak a message of wisdom among the mature

1 Cor. 14:20 In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

Heb. 5:13 Solid food if for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish between good and evil.

Col 4:12 Prayer that the Colossians will stand firm and be mature.

Heb. 5:14 A contrast between the initial doctrines, which are for babes, and the advanced doctrines which are for the mature.

James 3:2 The man who can control his tongue is mature.

Such usage of the English word "perfect" can be found in the Encyclopedia Britannica: After the first mechanical presses had been perfected, lithography had developed along two lines. This means that the printing press had reached a stage of completion. The first presses were perfected. They were made perfect. This means they were some how completely operational. The encyclopedia speaks of the printing press being perfected in the 16th century! It was "perfect."

a. When Paul says: When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away,"

he is saying: When that which is complete is come, that which is incomplete shall be done away.

- i. prophecy was "incomplete" revelation (1 Cor. 13:9)
- ii. the message in tongue speaking was "incomplete" revelation
- iii. the miraculous "knowledge" was "incomplete" incomplete (1 Cor. 13:9)

b. But once the New Testament had been recorded, God's new revelation to man was complete (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

c. This is much the same way that it worked with the recording of the Old Testament.

i. The last prophet of the Old Testament was Malachi. After his prophecy was recorded,

the Old Testament was complete. Thus came the cessation of the Old Testament prophets.

Malachi was followed by a four hundred year period when there were no prophets, until the coming of John the Baptist.

ii. With the completion of the New Testament came the cessation of NT prophecy.

iii. In the OT we have Moses saying that prophecy would continue after him (Deut. 18:14-22).

In the NT we have Paul saying that prophecy would cease.

It can be stated in this way:

When the OT was complete, prophecy ceased until Jesus came.
When the NT was complete, prophecy ceased.

d. **Ephesians 4:7-16**. This passage confirms the interpretation of 1 Cor. 13:8, 9 that prophecy, at least, would cease before the Second Coming of Jesus.

i. When Jesus ascended he gave gifts to men: apostles, prophets, evangelists, elders, teachers.

Here Paul is speaking of apostles, prophets, evangelists, elders and teachers who had charismatic gifts to help them carry out their functions. But, let us focus on the "prophets."

ii. He gave some to be prophets for a limited time. They were to continue **UNTIL** there was unity in the knowledge of the son of God and maturity, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. This is obviously before the Second Coming, because Paul goes on

to describe it as a time when:

- a. we will no longer be tossed back and forth by every false teaching (4:14)
- b. a time when the church will speak the truth in love (4:15)
- c. a time when the church will grow up into him (4:15)
- d. a time when the church will build itself up (4:15)
- e. a time when each part of the body will do its work (4:16)

iii. This is also the time when **miraculously endowed** evangelists, pastors and teachers would cease to operate.

2) As noted above, **teleios** is not a word which is used in the NT to refer to the Second Coming.

Rather, the NT uses a closely related word, **telos**.

τελος

Thayer: termination, the limit at which a thing ceases to be. In Greek literature it always means the end

of some act or state. **Τελος** is the word which refers to the Second Coming of Jesus (TDNT 8:55).

1 Cor. 1:8; 10:11; 15:24 Christ shall confirm you unto the **end**.

1 Cor. 15:23, 24 Paul specifically speaks of the Second Coming of Christ (23). Then he says: "Then the **end**."

CHARISMATIC OBJECTION: καταργεω in 1 Cor. 13:8 is a word which means to "destroy in judgment." Thus, the Second Coming must be in view. **Response:** This is the primary meaning of the word. However, it can be used in a non-judgment sense. Paul uses

this same word in verse 11 to speak about the putting away of childish things when he became a man. This is obviously not an act of judgment.

D. Prophecies and speaking in tongues will cease when we see "face to face."

1) Most naturally when we hear the term "face to face" we think of a face to face meeting with Jesus.

2) But the term can be used in a figurative sense.

a. Bauer, Greek-English Lexicon has this to say about the expression face to face:

[Used figuratively] in all kinds of more or less symbolic expressions which, in large part,

represent OT usage (Bauer, Greek-English Lexicon, "prosopon," 720-21).

i. Bauer cites 1 Cor. 13:12 as just such a figurative usage.

ii. Bauer says this usage represents OT usage. What he is saying is that like so many phrases

found in the New Testament, we should go to the Old Testament background to understand

what it means.

b. What is instructive here is that in 1 Cor. 13:8-12 we have a number of elements that are used in

the Old Testament in a figurative sense.

i. Each of these is found in contexts speaking about prophecy: this is the very thing that Paul

is talking about in this passage.

ii. What are the terms? face to face, mirrors, dimly.

iii. This is the language of prophecy and revelation.

3). The language of 1 Cor. 13:12 is the same as Num. 12:8 (Charles Hodge, Exposition of 1

Corinthians, 1857). Here God says that he speaks to other prophets in riddles, but he speaks

to Moses "face to face."

a. The Rabbis on Num. 12:6-8 said that this passage meant that God spoke to the prophets

only by dreams and visions, but he spoke to Moses clearly (R. Tachuna, 143a). In other

words, the Rabbis did not understand this phrase "face to face" to mean that Moses actually

saw God. Rather, it was a figure of speech indicating that God spoke clearly to Moses

(TDNT 1:178, line 28, 29).

b. God communicated to Moses in a fuller sense than he communicated to the other prophets, but

not necessarily a literal face to face communication.

c. Compare these two texts in the Greek NT and the LXX. A (somewhat) literal translation of

Num. 12:8 (LXX) (TDNT 1:178) and 1 Cor. 13:12

With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles. (Num. 12:8)

Now we see dimly riddles, but then face to face (1 Cor. 13:12)

d. Hodge says that it is all relative. i. Relative to the other prophets, Moses saw face to face (clearly).

- ii. Relative to Moses, the Jesus' disciples saw face to face (clearly) .
- iii. Relative to the disciples, the early church saw face to face (clearly).
- iv. Relative to the early church, the church with full revelation saw face to face (clearly).

3. Evidence for the Cessation of Miracles.

A. The ability to do miracles was imparted by the laying on the hands of the apostles.

There is no evidence that anyone was ever able to perform miracles without an apostle laying

his hands on him for this purpose.

1) In other words, if you were to be visiting a church, and were to see someone doing a miracle,

you could have asked him, "Which one of the apostles did you meet? Which apostle laid

his hands upon you? Paul? Peter? Matthew? John?

2) Thus, we can conclude that when the last apostle died, it was no longer possible for any new

people to receive the power to do miracles.

B. References to miracles in the early church are very frequent in earlier history (Acts, Galatians, 1

Cor.). But the later writings have less and less references to miracles. In the Gospel of John it is

said that he wrote about the miracles of Jesus so that the people of the first century could believe

that Jesus was the Christ. If the church was still doing miracles at that time, why did he not

simply remind them of the miracles being done in the church, as Paul did in Galatians?

C. Historical Evidence for the Cessation of Spiritual Gifts.

1). There is no Biblical reference to speaking in tongues after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

2) In AD 96 Clement of Rome wrote an epistle to Corinth. 65 chapters long. In it there is not

a single reference to speaking in tongues.

3). It is a known fact that speaking in tongues, miracles and gifts ceased around AD 100 and

we do not read about it again until about the 19th century. Tongue speaking virtually disappeared in mainstream churches!

a. Pentecostals themselves explain this phenomenon (the virtual disappearance of tongue

speaking and other miracles and gifts from the mainstream of the church) as due to a lack of

faith in or rejection of the Holy Spirit by the church. I.e., the church became unspiritual. The

need of to Pentecostals to explain the cessation of tongues and miracles at the end of the first

century speaks volumes about the truth of the cessation, no matter their explanation of the

reason.

b. Brunner quotes David duPlessis, a leading Pentecostal, as writing: "The Holy Spirit continued

in control until the close of the first century, when He was largely rejected and His

position

as leader usurped by men (Brunner, A Theology of the Holy Spirit. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1970, p. 27).

c. However, it may be noted that the church at Corinth seems to have more spiritual gifts than any other church, and yet it was a most ungodly group of people.

4) Shepherd of Hermes. The cessation of prophecy seems to have caused some problems in the early church. Shepherd of Hermes is a document that was in wide circulation in 140 AD.

In mandata, 11 we see:

1. It appears that when prophecy ceased in the early church it caused a big problem. Here was

the problem. In the early church there were:

- a) prophets
- b) the discerner of prophets and
- c) false prophets.

2. When the supernatural gifts began to cease, as Paul said they would, there came a point where there were no prophets and there were no discerner of prophets. Wat was left?

False prophets.

- a) There were no true prophets because that gift had ceased.
- b) There were no discerner of prophets because that gift had ceased.

3. Hermes was dealing with the question of how to prove that false prophets were indeed false

prophets. Here is what we find in his letter.

a) True prophets did not have special secret seats for the giving of knowledge. That is, they did not conduct their prophecy in the privacy of their home among a few select individuals.

Rather prophesy took place in the congregation of the saints.

b) True prophets were not consulted like soothsayers. According to Hermes one indication

of false prophets was that they allowed themselves to be consulted on private matters such

as health or personal finance.

c) True prophets did not approach God, as the false prophets promised to do. Rather they waited for God to approach them.

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